

# Older Americans: A Great Resource for Keeping Youth Drug Free



**Publication No. (ADP) 01-1576**

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## **A Great Resource for Keeping Youth Drug Free**

As more and more retirees today are leaving their careers active and healthy, community programs have access to an increasing pool of potential volunteers with time and energy to contribute to society. Community groups are not the only ones to benefit. Research shows that volunteering improves the lives of older Americans.

According to a Cornell University Study, **retirees who volunteer or participate in community organizations enjoy significantly higher levels of psychological and physical well-being** than other retirees and older workers. The reason: volunteering connects retirees socially and provides routines, rituals, and additional roles.

With the skills, experiences, and resources they have to give, older Americans are a terrific resource for young people and their time is desperately needed. Today's youth are facing risks never before imagined, including pressures to use alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs. And many of them are facing these pressures alone.

Changes in family structures and neighborhood networks mean that many young people are spending an increased amount of time unsupervised. What today's young people need are fun, structured, and challenging ways to spend their free time. They want someone to care about them, listen to them, and teach them. Older Americans can play that role.

### **Be a Friend—Volunteer**

**You can make a real difference in a young person's life** by volunteering to do easy and fun activities. Read to a child. Share a hobby like sewing, woodworking, or photography. Organize a neighborhood clean-up day.

Research shows that young people are less likely to use drugs and alcohol when they have something positive and meaningful to do. Most important is that they spend quality time with a caring adult building the skills they need to stay drug free.

Getting involved with young people doesn't have to involve an enormous time commitment. Spending just a few hours with a child once a week or once a month can make an enormous impact.

Think about the kinds of things that you like to do and involve a young person in those activities. If you like to bowl, take a young person bowling. If you're a gardener, show a group of young people how to plant bulbs. The time you spend with young people can make a big difference for their future.

### **Become a Mentor**

If you have more time to give, you could be a mentor. A mentor is a responsible adult who provides a child with support, advice, friendship, reinforcement, and a constructive example to support the efforts of parents.

### **Getting Connected with Volunteering and Mentoring Opportunities**

There are many great resources for older Americans who want to become volunteers or mentors:

**The National Senior Service Corps' Foster Grandparents** program provides opportunities for seniors to give emotional support to children who are victims of abuse and neglect, tutor young people who lag behind in reading, mentor troubled teenagers and young mothers, and care for infants and children with physical disabilities and severe illnesses.

**SERVEnet** is a program of Youth Service America. It brings thousands of volunteers and community programs together by matching the skills, experience, and enthusiasm of dedicated volunteers with nonprofit organizations who need their participation.

**Your local schools** may have programs where older Americans can volunteer to improve the lives of youth.

**The American Association of Retired Persons** offers information about many ongoing volunteer programs and how seniors can be involved.

**Contact local civic clubs, religious institutions, local chapters of professional organizations, and local volunteer centers** for information about volunteering and mentoring opportunities in your area

*To receive a free packet of information about mentor programs throughout the state, call the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs at 1-800-444-3066.*

**Here is a List of Some Characteristics  
of a Good Mentor**

Willingness to listen

Willingness to learn

Availability of time

Patience

Appreciation of others' cultural environments

Respect for the youth and the youth's family, as well  
as the sponsoring organization

Willingness to share their experiences and expertise

Easygoing attitude (not easily offended)

Persistence

Sense of humor

Reliability

Willingness to relate to other mentors

Ability to accept supervision

Willingness to set limits with young people

Warmth, flexibility, openness, creativity